



Yom Kippur in the Synagogue | painting by Maurycy Gottlieb (1878)

Why Do Messianic Jews Fast on Yom Kippur?

Glad You Asked!

Dear Jewish Voice,

Since Yeshua has accomplished eternal atonement, there is no need to fast and pray on Yom Kippur in order to obtain atonement. If we say that the Messiah is the Pascal Lamb, that Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us, why do Messianic Jews pray and fast on Yom Kippur? Isn't that an insult to God? I look forward to your answer! JJ, South Bend, IN

Dear JJ,

Thank you for your question. I'm sure that others have questioned this as well. Let's begin by looking at the original commandment to observe Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement:

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And **any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.** You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute **forever throughout your generations** in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbath." Leviticus 23:26-32*

Two points are prominent – this observance is forever/throughout our generations, and if we ignore it, we are essentially cutting ourselves off from our own Jewish People.

I have a personal story that illustrates the cost of being cut off of our People. As Jewish Believers, my husband and I always observed Yom Kippur in the traditional way, by fasting and observing a "Special Shabbat" or special day of rest, as commanded.

In addition, as Believers, we pray for the restoration of Israel and the

Jewish People scattered throughout the Earth to know Yeshua, their Messiah. We have been chastised and discouraged by non-Jewish Christians and accused of being “legalistic” for observing what is perceived as “Jewish” customs. However, God’s Word is living and active – life-giving and productive. We embrace the whole of Scripture not to earn our salvation, but because we are His redeemed and therefore able to appreciate the ways of His Kingdom.

However, one Yom Kippur, it was necessary to drop some items off at a Chassidic family’s home, as a mutual friend was leaving for Israel after sundown, and we had items to send. When I knocked on the door, the children invited me in and led me to their mother who was stretched out on the couch. Apologetically, in her heavy Israeli accent, she explained, “It is Yom Kippur and I always get a headache when I fast – please forgive for not getting up.”

I told her that I felt just as sick and never would have driven over if it weren’t for needing to be able to send the items to Israel. She opened her eyes and said, “but you are Messianic...and you still do *our* mitzvot?!” (*Mitzvot* is Hebrew for Commandments or Covenant Observances.)

I said, “of course we do!”

At that she jumped up and hugged me, saying “Oh, *mishpochah!* You are my sister!” (*Mishpochah* is Hebrew for family.)

We became good friends and she was very open to discussions about *Mashiach ben David* (Messiah, Son of David). She heard many things that she likely would never have had the opportunity to hear in her Orthodox community otherwise. If we had forsaken our covenant observances, I would have been cut off from her—*my people*, just as the Word says, through a bad witness. For I would be serving a foreign god in her eyes – not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Messianic Jews continue to be members of a Covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God has not abrogated His Covenant. His gifts and callings to Israel are irrevocable, for His own Name’s sake. (Romans 11:29)

Did you know that the Jewish People did not receive salvation by observing the rituals of the Day of Atonements? Forgiveness and atonement has always been a faith issue. Before Yeshua came, people trusted in the blood of sheep and goats to cover their sins year to year as they repented before God. The blood of sheep and goats was imperfect. Once Perfect came in the form of Yeshua, atonement is available for eternity, purchased by His sacrificial death.

However, there is world of Jewish People – *His own brethren* – who don't know that He came. Yeshua has been disguised from His own. There is a supernatural blindness in part, upon the eyes of the Jewish People, as Romans 11:25 says—and there has also been a blindness upon the Church that has caused great harm to be done to the Jewish People in the Name of Jesus—making Him a curse and a foreign god, hostile to Jews.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a day set apart in God's calendar of appointments to deny yourself (deny the flesh), rest and pray—a perfect day to spend in the presence of the Lord, in intercession. As a member of the “Church,” we can ask God's forgiveness on behalf of the legacy of hate toward Israel and the Jewish People in Jesus' Name and under the sign of the cross. And we can pray for Israel—the country and the People scattered throughout the earth. This is a time that a Jewish heart is tender and turned toward God in *teshuvah*—true repentance, seeking forgiveness and a fresh start. Pray that God will answer every sincere cry that goes up to Him!

Often, our congregation will gather and fast together for the day, reading through the deep and reverent liturgies and biblical texts that are traditional and interceding for Israel and the Jewish People. We then break fast together at sundown. It can be a very rich experience for Believers.

Considering this day Jewish People around the world are fasting, praying, and humbling themselves before God—for some perhaps the only time of the year – what better day to join with all Israel in a biblically-mandated appointment with God?

I hope this has been helpful and encouraging.

For Zion's sake, Sarah